1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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group. From 1851, when it composed 45 per cent. of the total, this element steadily decreased, absolutely and relatively. This general trend resulted from normal sociological changes consequent on a maturing of the whole economy and from the growing dominance of male employing service industries. At the same time, the preponderantly feminine cotton industry was steadily declining (see pp. 123 and 124).

One of the most significant indicators of economic change is that of male employment in agriculture (Fig. 31). During the first century of British rule, agriculture played no part in the economic expansion which was in train. Agricultural prosperity became a function of general prosperity and therefore to a large extent mirrored external fortune. Employment in the industry on the other hand, except for the shortlived cotton growing boom of the 1860's during the American Civil War, varied inversely with general economic activity. In Malta, as in most countries, it would be true to say that rising profits in farming benefited existing producers but failed to attract net incomers. On the other hand, population growth, the cessation of employment elsewhere, obstacles to emigration or even forces producing a return of migrants all periodically forced some workers back on to the land. Thus in the years between 1851 and 1871 while the population was growing more quickly than the slow but accelerating commercial activity, sheer population pressure and migration trends (16) forced the level of male agricultural employment from c. 7,000 to c. 9,000. During the Golden Years and the subsequent period of large-scale dockyard and public works construction numbers fell once more to c. 7,000 in 1901. Later stagnation in commerce and a decline in constructional work culminating in a severe depression (necessitating a Royal Commission) were marked by an increase in the number of farmworkers to 8,500 in 1911. These general fluctuations can be corroborated by reference to farm family histories and by changes in the availability of land. Behind the overall absence of numerical change and of those of secular variations we may discern some of the fundamental features of Maltese agriculture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the better land had already been occupied by as many farmworkers as contemporary productivity could properly support. This number remained more or less constant, first because the economic and social climate was not propitious to the labour saving innovations which were sweeping over Europe, and secondly because the intake of land from waste did little more than compensate for losses elsewhere. We have a picture of a technically static, status declining and credit starved industry which from time to time lost some of its most vigorous and enterprising young workers or gained a flood of generally poor and semi-skilled labourers.

More true of Malta than of Gozo, this picture must be modified to accommodate regional differences and changes. Already in the eighteenth century, as we have noted, a cleavage existed in Malta between the *urbs* around Valletta, the Old City of Mdina-Rabat, and the rural communities. By the middle of the nineteenth century, this had developed into an embryonic form of the present division into urban, suburban and rural communities (Fig. 36). The social and demographic reasons for and implications of this are considered elsewhere (Chapter VI A) but the internal economic factors need present consideration.

Before the building of the railway in 1881, the tramways in 1905, and the later motorable roads, communication between villages and between country and town was relatively limited. Within those areas physically closest to what had now become the Grand Harbour the attraction/repulsion effects on agricultural employment were most strongly felt. On the eastern urban fringe, in the Żabbar area, these fluctuations were very violent and indicative of too complete reliance on two simple forms of economic activity, dockyard work and farming. On the western fringe the expanding economic and political functions of the nuclear *urbs* overwhelmed old villages such as Birkirkara and created new townships such as that of Hamrun in a more complex urbanisation (Figs. 32 and 39). Fluctuations in agricultural employment still occurred but these were less important than the steady decline in the total.

The changes outlined above proceeded slowly but at an accelerating rate during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. By 1871 popula-

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P. 123]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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XX (a). THE TARXIEN-GHAXAQ BASIN

This is the open upper section of the shallow Wied ta'Mazza which reaches the sea at Marsaskala. Rock weathering and slow soil formation on the periphery surround a central zone of deep soil accumulation. The deep-soiled district is one in which the upper surface of the Lower Coralline aquifers falls below sea-level and, compared with the remainder of the Eastern Region, ground water is of high salinity (see Chapter I B). The effect of this is to be seen primarily in the small area devoted to potato growing. This zone of large fields under cereals and sulla is surrounded by a belt of more intensive cultivation on the higher slopes, where fields are smaller and potatoes re-assume their normal importance in the crop range. Part of this latter zone, on the northern outskirts of Żejtun, is shown in Fig. 122. 29 31

Exceptional is an area of abandonment at il-Bur ta'Sufa (MR 573688), where it is believed that increasing soil salinity is primarily responsible. This small hill, once the site of the only clustered farm settlement in the sub-region, has also suffered from the attraction of the surrounding casals. Carob trees and crumbling terrace walls mark this out as the only area of difficulty in an otherwise tractable region.

XX (b). THE LUQA-ŻEJTUN RIDGE

A crescentic ridge, which separates the catchment areas of the Grand Harbour and Marsaxlokk Bay is crowned by a series of settlements. Near these, fairly intensive cultivation, best developed around Luqa, includes that of potatoes, onions and other spring vegetables. Where the soil mantle is thinnest and most subject to erosion, cultivation is poorer. For example, just north of Gudja, at ta'Salib (265), a harder bed in the Globigerina series has formed a small mesa as a result of differential erosion. The top and steep sides of this feature are marked by abandoned fields. [361]

Much of the better land in this sub-region is now being taken up by settlement extension and road building, a process most marked between Żejtun and Ghaxaq. [499]

XX (c). THE ŻABBAR REGION

The primary unity of this region is provided by general specialisation in the production of *garagh baghli* (dry-farmed marrows grown in spring: see Fig. 123 and p. 219). Subsidiary to this unifying feature are a number of diverse elements.

On the seaward slopes of the San Anard (244) - San Rokku (248) ridge, a belt of wasteland covers the barren shore and abandoned fields of minute size rising above it. North of San Rokku, abandonment is complete where these slopes coincide with a Lower Coralline outcrop. Near the growing village of ix-Xghajra, patches of poor cultivation have survived. The whole of this district is one of particular difficulty. Coastal alignment of the ridge and its pronounced relief accentuate the effects of northerly winds, which carry sea-spray some distance inland. The extreme smallness of the walled enclosures indicates the need for shelter and it is not surprising that this exposed and difficult area should have been left derelict. On the 6-inch maps is marked a rectilinear pattern of proposed road and building development. As yet, ix-Xghajra, a strange motley of farmhouses, suburban and sea-side villas, is the only realisation of the plan. It may well be that land speculation has here contributed to land abandonment. [361]

The ridge top and its sheltered southern flank, with their larger fields, form a vivid contrast. This richer-soiled area is given over to a diversity of crops, *garagh baghli*, potatoes and other spring vegetables occupying as large an area as that under all other crops combined. This type of farming is carried southward across the rise of tal-Pileri (251) and into the Wied ta'Mazza (257). South and west from the latter in the Bajda ta'Żejtun (260) and ta'Bulebel (256) districts, there is a transition to the less specialised farming typical of the Eastern Region as a whole.